DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 438 HE 032 028

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Gaff, Jerry G. |
| TITLE | General Education: The Changing Agenda. The Academy in Transition. |
| INSTITUTION | Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington, DC. |
| ISBN | ISBN-0-911696-75-X |
| PUB DATE | 1999-00-00 |
| NOTE | 27p.; For related report, see HE 032 027. "Third in a series of discussion papers for faculty members and academic leaders." |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1818 R Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-1604; Tel: 800-297-3775 (Toll Free); Fax: 202--265-9532; Web site: http://www.aacu-edu.org ($10). |
| PUB TYPE | Books (010) -- Opinion Papers (120) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Accountability; Change Strategies; *College Curriculum; Educational Change; Educational Objectives; *Educational Trends; *General Education; Higher Education; Intellectual Disciplines; *Majors (Students); Trend Analysis |

ABSTRACT

The intent of this discussion paper is to provide a survey of emerging trends in general education reform at institutions of higher education. Ten themes are identified: (1) rethinking the major; (2) concern with student learning beyond course content; (3) an increased emphasis on diversity; (4) the importance of technology; (5) efficiency and effectiveness; (6) the need for more emphasis on implementation strategies in improving general education; (7) new administrative models; (8) the necessity of program assessment; (9) combining of change initiatives; and (10) convergence of two movements one to improve general education and the other concerned with accountability, fiscal responsibility, and prudent management. (Contains 48 references.) (DB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

the Academy in Transition

ED 430 438

# General Education: THE CHANGING AGENDA

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

AAC&U

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HE 032 028

JERRY G. GAFF

THIRD IN A SERIES OF DISCUSSION PAPERS FOR FACULTY MEMBERS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS

THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# General Education:
## *The Changing Agenda*

JERRY G. GAFF

Published by the
Association of American Colleges and Universities
1818 R Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
www.aacu-edu.org

copyright ©1999

ISBN 0-911696-75-X 4

# *Contents*

About this Series . . . . . vii

General Education: The Changing Agenda . . . . . 1

Works Cited . . . . . 14

Further Recommended Reading . . . . . 15

AAC&U Publications on General Education . . . . . 16

# the Academy in Transition

Jerry G. Gaff
SERIES EDITOR

**Other Titles in the Series**

Contemporary Understandings of Liberal Education
**by Carol Geary Schneider and Robert Shoenberg**

Mapping Interdisciplinary Studies
**by Julie Thompson Klein**

6

# *About this series*

Convinced that American higher education is in the midst of significant academic changes, AAC&U is launching a new series of occasional papers under the rubric of The Academy in Transition. We recognize that confusion can result from competing calls for change: different voices are demanding new approaches, conflicting agendas are advocated, and the future of higher education is uncertain. The purposes of this series are to analyze changes taking place in key areas of higher education and to provide road maps about the directions and destinations of the changing academy.

The first in this series is *Contemporary Understandings of Liberal Education* by Carol Geary Schneider and Robert Shoenberg. Besides this overview on general education, other papers in preparation include analyses of interdisciplinary education, diversity and learning, education for global understanding, and the intersections of educational quality and cost. As the topics imply, we are convinced that the new academy will interpret traditional concepts of liberal education in contemporary contexts, prize general education more highly, recognize the interrelatedness of disciplines, value the contribution of diversity to quality in education, and incorporate global perspectives as a means for learning, while becoming more cost effective. Collectively, these papers point to a different, more purposeful, robust, and efficient academy that is in the process of being created.

AAC&U encourages faculty members, academic leaders, and all those who care about the future of our colleges and universities to use these papers as a point of departure for their own analyses of the directions of educational change. We hope these essays will encourage academics to think broadly and creatively about the educational communities we inherit, and, by our contributions, the educational communities we want to create.

# *The Changing Agenda*

For the last two decades, ever since the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1977) declared general education to be a "disaster area," the nation's colleges and universities have made a steady effort to revitalize their core curricula, investing the undergraduate experience with a greater sense of purpose, rigor, and clarity. For example, the American Council on Education reports that roughly 80 to 90 percent of their member institutions reviewed and/or revised their undergraduate curricula during the 1980s. AAC&U's own projects have assisted nearly 1,000 institutions in reforming their general education programs, and our conferences and institutes continue to draw large numbers of participants from institutions of all kinds.

Of course, not everyone has acknowledged these widespread and continuing efforts to improve the undergraduate curriculum. For instance, a widely-publicized report from the National Association of Scholars (1996) lamented that fifty leading colleges and universities have seen a dissolution of rigorous general education programs, with a decline in requirements to study the liberal arts, mathematics, science, and foreign languages. However, while the NAS has shown interest in the quality of general education, their report can only be described as misleading. To survey a few dozen elite institutions is hardly to demonstrate a larger trend, and the report misses the recent shift in general education toward developing student capacities and intellectual skills across the curriculum. In fact, AAC&U has worked with hundreds of schools (including every kind of institution, large and small, public and private, secular and religious, research university and community college) that are actively seeking to build stronger core curricula.

Signs of progress can be seen in a variety of areas, including campus task forces on general education, assessment projects on the core curriculum, and a range of related curricular and faculty development initiatives. While these efforts have, admittedly, been uneven, the overall picture clearly indicates a number of promising contemporary trends, including:

- Renewed emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences subject matter, extending into professional and pre-professional programs
- Attention to fundamental intellectual skills, such as writing, speaking, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, computing, and foreign language proficiency

- Higher standards and strengthened core programs that are required of all students, regardless of their academic major or intended career
- Interest in interdisciplinary study and the integration of knowledge gained in various parts of the curriculum
- Commitment to the study of diversity in the U.S., incorporating new scholarship on race, gender, sexuality, class, age, and other aspects of identity
- Expansion of global studies programs, as well as the incorporation of international themes into existing general education programs
- Interest in the moral and ethical dimensions of each field of study
- Recognition that the freshman year amounts to a critical transition, and the creation of special courses and new support systems to promote greater academic success
- Attention to the senior year, when students increasingly are expected to pull together strands of learning and demonstrate their abilities to apply their knowledge
- Extension of general education into advanced study and throughout all four years of college
- Heightened interest in active, experiential, technological, and collaborative methods of learning
- New approaches to the assessment of learning outcomes, and greater use of the results to improve courses and programs
- Administrative support for faculty members to collaborate in their curricular planning, course development, and teaching of core courses

In short, and contrary to the impression left by some attacks on higher education, the undergraduate curriculum at large numbers of institutions has improved greatly over the past two decades. For those who would contribute to this progress, it is important to understand both the breadth and the complexity of this work. Since this current revival of general education began, conditions in higher education have changed considerably, in part because of the revival itself. As a result, would-be curriculum reformers today must employ very different strategies from their counterparts fifteen to twenty years ago. Not that previous approaches were wrong, but new developments and new campus dynamics pose new opportunities and constraints.

This paper provides a brief survey of emerging trends in general education reform. It serves as a road map, if you will, a guide to recent efforts to improve the undergradu-

ate curriculum. It aims to help readers understand the range of priorities that now comprise the reform agenda, as well as to understand the ways in which those priorities have changed over the past twenty years. The goal is not to advocate a particular strategy for change but, rather, to give campus leaders conceptual tools that they can use in analyzing their own curricula and in working to improve their own undergraduate programs.

A description of ten key themes in general education reform, with particular attention to the most recent ideas and trends, provides the means for revitalizing curricula.

**1. The Major**

Twenty years ago, in the wake of the Carnegie Foundation report on general education, most campus task forces made the strategic decision to bracket of any concerns over the quality of the academic major, leaving this topic untouched by reform efforts. Rather, they decided to concentrate their time, attention, and energy—and that of their colleagues—on general education. At that point, to rethink the entirety of the undergraduate curriculum seemed an impossible task, and just to revitalize general education seemed difficult enough. Further, reformers believed that by improving general education, the largest academic program on most campuses, they could have a significant impact upon the overall quality of baccalaureate education.

Moreover, another strategic consideration entered into the decision to leave the major off the reform agenda. Because faculty tend to be most invested in their own disciplines and departments, any review of the major might have seemed threatening, possibly leading them to derail the entire review process. Thus, it seemed prudent to assure the faculty that majors would not be questioned and that their autonomy would be honored.

More recently, however, the major has come to be examined along with the general education program. One reason is that the majors have grown, gradually nibbling away at the size and moral authority of general education. It has become clear that if the centrifugal forces of disciplinary majors are not confronted, they will present real constraints on the ability to strengthen the core. Thus, for example, many institutions have chosen to limit the number of hours that a major may include.

Another reason for rethinking the major has to do with the academy's commitment to the very purposes of general education. College faculties engage in an elaborate process of determining the most important knowledge and skills for students to learn, and they assign the task of promoting these goals to the roughly one-third of the curriculum that is general education. If these goals are deemed to be so important, shouldn't they become the responsibility of the entire community, including departmental majors?

If writing or quantitative reasoning, for example, are essential, why are they confined to a freshman course—and then ignored? To be mastered, these abilities must be reinforced and refined throughout the undergraduate curriculum.

In sum, today's campus leaders must attend not merely to the coherence of the general education program but also to the interrelation of general education and the majors. As Ernest Boyer (1987) put it, "Rather than divide the undergraduate experience into separate camps—general versus specialized education—the curriculum of a college of quality will bring the two together."

*Campus leaders must attend not merely to the coherence of the general education program but also to the interrelation of general education and the majors.*

**2. Beyond Content**

When the revival of interest in general education began, attention focused almost exclusively on content, that is, on what students knew (or, more frequently, what they didn't know). Notable critics of the curriculum, such as William Bennett (1984), Lynne Cheney (1989), Ernest Boyer and Arthur Levine (1981), Alan Bloom (1987), and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1987), debated the relative importance of various sorts of knowledge, to the point that content crowded out other aspects of the educational process. Little attention was given to the teacher and strategies for teaching, the student and different paths to learning, or to the learning environment itself, which can support or constrain teaching and learning.

In recent years, considerable research on the undergraduate experience has emerged, and this research has led to various new approaches to the curriculum. For example, Astin (1994) demonstrated that involvement—referring to factors such as academic relationships with peers, informal relationships with faculty, and time spent in studying—is key to student learning. Thus, there has been considerable interest in various sorts of learning communities, which have proven effective in fostering academic achievement, satisfaction with college, and high retention and graduation rates (Matthews, et. al. 1997). Likewise, research supports the effectiveness of active learning approaches, such as experiential and service learning, internships, collaborative group projects, and case studies (Chickering and Gamson 1991; Froh and Hawkes 1996).

Today, it would be irresponsible for a campus committee to concentrate on *what* is to be learned to the exclusion of *how* it is to be learned. Thus, many institutions have developed curricular schemes that not only specify content but that also involve active and collaborative approaches to learning or that include built-in experiential components. For example, Portland State University assigns each first-year student to an interdisciplinary learning community that emphasizes the development of skills and collec-

tive responsibility for learning, and it requires seniors to participate in another learning community that focuses on analyzing and seeking solutions to urban problems. And St. Francis College (PA) has added a ten-hour service learning component to its required Introduction to Religion course, a change that has succeeded both in enlivening the course and in connecting its content to real world problems.

**3. Diversity**

In a 1990 survey, 226 academic administrators, all of them based at institutions that were making changes in their general education programs, were asked what would be the most important agendas on their campuses in the coming decade (Gaff 1991). The top two responses were global and domestic diversity. Nearly ten years later, the intense and ongoing interest in diversity confirms the predictions of those administrators.

AAC&U itself has been extremely active in helping colleges and universities both to incorporate diversity-related themes into their educational programs and to create inclusive campus communities. Through its initiative American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, the Association addresses fundamental questions about higher education in a diverse society and provides resources to institutions willing to address them. A recent project description (1996) states the central issues:

> What distinguishes AAC&U's leadership on diversity is our conviction that democracy cannot fulfill its aspirations without acknowledging diversity and that diversity finds a moral compass in democratic values and principles. Diversity does not result in the fragmentation of people participating equally in a democracy. Higher education, we believe, can nurture Americans' commitment and capacity to create a society in which democratic aspirations become democratic justice and diversity proves a means of forging a deeper unity.

*Democracy cannot fulfill its aspirations without acknowledging diversity.*

Although this agenda transcends the topic of general education reform, much of it plays out in the core curriculum. For example, American Commitments has, to date, engaged ninety-two institutions in a network to support the development of faculty and courses, held leadership institutes for twenty-five campus teams to develop institution-wide plans, assisted ninety campuses to engage in dialogues with their communities about racial reconciliation, and operated a large clearinghouse of information about diversity and learning, which can be accessed through a special site on the World Wide Web (http://www.inform.umd.edu/diversityweb). This effort is part of a larger campus diversity initiative, supported by the Ford Foundation, that involves a total of 275 institutions. And countless other institutions have worked to incorporate diversity-related

themes into their general education programs. Quite simply, it would now be unrealistic for curriculum designers to neglect topics such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender in new designs for general education.

### 4. Technology

It has long been recognized that college graduates will be at a disadvantage if they are unable to use state-of-the-art technology in their jobs, and computer literacy has been a staple of general education for much of the last two decades. However, the standards of computer literacy have been ratcheted up considerably over this period. During the late 1970s, the term referred to a general familiarity with hardware, a rudimentary competence in a programming language, some ability to use spreadsheets and word processing programs, and some awareness of ethical issues regarding computers. Today this definition seems quaint, and the bar of competence has been raised. Indeed, computer literacy now refers to the ability to utilize the computer and other technology as meaningful tools for analysis and study.

James Farmer, writing in the *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum* (1997), offers a more precise definition of computer literacy. Now college students should: a) be able to access information sources found on the Internet and be familiar with Web browsers, search engines, and sources of information related to their own fields; b) understand indexing and searching well enough to find needed information in all types of media and on all topics; c) be able to use word processing, spread sheets, database management systems, and presentation software; and d) make effective use of this software to communicate with others. Knowledge of hardware now seems less important, and the proliferation of programs has made knowledge of programming language unnecessary for the average person.

Ironically, the biggest obstacle (apart from the expense) to meeting these challenges has to do not with instructing students but with bringing faculty members up to speed, so that they can incorporate computer applications into their courses and assignments. Faculty development for technological sophistication is, as many institutions are discovering, an ongoing concern. In this rapidly changing area, students often are the teachers of the faculty.

On the other hand, the explosion of information makes it essential for faculty to help students evaluate sources, question the validity of claims, and make connections among diverse data sets. Although the technology is new, the perennial task of education, making meaning and assessing truthfulness and utility of assertions, remains.

**5. Efficiency and Effectiveness**

The initial motivation to improve general education stemmed from a concern about educational quality: It appeared that students were not learning to think clearly, communicate well, or solve problems. But in recent years, the shape of general education reform has been influenced also by the financial pressure that has come to bear upon most colleges and universities. The recession of the early 1990s gave way to a slow growth economy, demands for government downsizing, and competition for public funds for tax relief and other social purposes, such as health care, entitlements, and prisons. Public colleges and universities have been faced with a barrage of budget cuts, and private institutions have found their budgets negatively impacted by the spiraling growth of student aid. In other words, the need to operate efficiently has joined the need to operate effectively.

In the past, these two purposes were seen as antithetical. Reformers assumed that in order to improve the quality of general education, they would have to secure new resources, which they would use to add faculty, develop new programs, and increase course offerings. Conversely, they assumed that any cutbacks in resources would have a negative effect on general education: They would have to cut sections of required courses and replace full-time with part-time faculty. However, these assumptions have begun to give way to new ideas about the relationship between effectiveness and efficiency.

*Although the technology is new, the perennial task of education, making meaning and assessing truthfulness and utility of assertions, remains.*

Several things need to be said about efficiency in general education. First, the loose distribution system—still the most prevalent form—is more expensive than other kinds of general education programs, more so than a true core curriculum having more predictable and uniform course enrollments or one with fewer courses targeted to high priority student learning goals. Second, the effort to make a more coherent course of study, guided by widely shared educational goals, is both effective and efficient. It is effective in that it focuses the curriculum on what the faculty has determined to be the most important learning goals. It is efficient in that it gets the faculty to address the same or related goals across the curriculum.

Furthermore, recent research has documented the value of certain components of general education programs. Learning communities (Matthews, et al. 1997), freshman seminars (Fidler and Hunter 1989), and comprehensive diversity programs (Smith, et al. 1997), for example, have been shown to produce greater student achievement and retention, suggesting that such strategies yield not only good education and student success, and they cost less to produce a degree. They exemplify the intersections of effectiveness and efficiency.

Ann Ferren and Rick Slavings (forthcoming) have developed a set of questions that can be used to analyze general education practices and to identify budget reallocations. Such questions include, for example: *What if the university reduced its new freshman attrition rate? What if it salvaged at-risk students? What if it increased the success of students in "killer courses" (those with high failure rates)? What if it reduced its failure rate in upper division courses? What if it reduced the number of discretionary courses (those that meet no program requirement or course prerequisite) or the frequency with which they are offered?* Using the data for Radford University, they developed models representing the potential financial benefits. Then, Ferren, Radford's chief academic officer, reallocated dollars to critical points of educational leverage. By investing in a more intensive freshman year program, she was able to increase the retention rate from freshman to sophomore year, which translates into better education as well as lower cost to degree. Similarly, she added tutors for students enrolled in courses with high failure rates, and found a lower failure rate, which not only amounted to better education but also saved money, since it reduced the need for repeating courses or for more costly remediation. These are examples of intersections of educational effectiveness and efficiency that can be achieved by carefully crafted general education practices. In the current climate, higher education needs to search for more such intersections.

### 6. Implementation

Over the last twenty years, institutions have learned that implementation strategies are a weak link in efforts to improve general education. Typically, campuses make considerable up-front investments in task forces or review committees. Members are sometimes given release time, supported to attend conferences and workshops to learn about curricular issues and trends, and given reading materials to study. Often, retreats bring people together to discuss issues, consultants are hired to help develop a curriculum design, and faculty groups work to fashion a freshman seminar or interdisciplinary core course, for example.

As Kanter and her colleagues (1996) demonstrate, too often such resources dry up after faculty approve a proposal for reform. As successful curriculum reformers have discovered, significant curricular change requires substantial investment in ongoing faculty and course development. A survey of institutions (Gaff 1991) making various changes in their curricula revealed that those making a greater investment in faculty development reported a greater increase in the quality of education, more curricular coherence, more active learning, a stronger sense of community, a sharper institutional identity, and,

above all, more faculty renewal. Without such support for change, existing courses simply appear under a different rubric, old wine in a new bottle. Unless an institution can see its way clear to make such a commitment to ongoing development, it would be well advised not to consider a major change in general education.

### 7. Administration

If general education consists solely of distribution requirements, meant to expose students to a range of knowledge and ways of knowing, then administering the program becomes a fairly simple task: It simply requires a registrar to ensure that students complete their graduation requirements. But if general education is designed to achieve certain purposes, such as acquiring writing proficiency or developing understanding of other peoples, then someone needs to oversee the programs designed to help students achieve those goals.

A variety of new administrative positions have appeared on the organizational charts of colleges and universities: directors or coordinators of writing, oral communications, academic computing, intercultural studies, freshman seminars, and senior seminars. Most are part-time positions, filled by faculty members who continue to teach at a reduced load. Typically, the job involves such tasks as recruiting colleagues to teach in the program, providing orientation for students and professional development for faculty, preparing written materials that describe the program, trouble-shooting, responding to student complaints, conducting assessments, and generally looking after the welfare of the program.

If a general education program is designed to be coherent, then an administrative structure must be in place to actively foster coherence. This is not something that magically happens by itself. Hundreds of institutions have created the position, often part-time, of coordinator, director, or dean of general education, or they have assigned an assistant dean or associate provost to be primarily responsible for the whole of the general education program. These appointees act as primary advocates for general education and ensure that operational programs function as much as possible in the ways they were intended. Often, they are assisted by an institution-wide general education committee composed of faculty representatives and, frequently, include students.

Not surprisingly, these campus leaders often seek out their counterparts on other campuses for support. This has led to the creation of several new professional organizations. For example, the Conference of Writing Program Administrators provides various professional development opportunities; the Freshman and Senior Experience Network

holds national and regional conferences to showcase campus programs and discuss problems and strategies; and the Council for the Administration of General and Liberal Studies manages a network of program directors. Today, as campus leaders make proposals for improving general education, plans for the administration of the program must be included.

### 8. Assessment

When this revival of general education began, assessment was commonly assumed to be a valuable practice, but few reformers thought of it as an absolutely necessary activity. Over the past twenty years, though, a great deal has been learned about the intricacies and importance of assessment, and it has become a key part of the reform agenda. For example, the American Association of Higher Education now holds an annual conference on assessment that usually attracts over 1,000 practitioners; Jossey-Bass publishes an *Assessment Newsletter* containing state-of-the-art principles and practices; and a host of studies, instruments, and campus assessment offices have emerged.

*The faculty as a whole must develop a sense of ownership of the assessment effort and must use the results to improve the general education program.*

Today, proposals for curriculum change must include plans for assessment. It has become axiomatic that the faculty as a whole must develop a sense of ownership of the assessment effort, as well as of the curriculum, and must use the results to improve the general education program.

In fact, assessment has become a condition for accreditation required by all of the regional accrediting bodies and by many of the specialized accrediting groups. López (1998) studied reports of accreditation teams that visited 130 institutions and identified four elements in documenting the implementation of an assessment plan: 1) explicit objectives for student learning, 2) evidence of how assessment information was collected and evaluated, 3) documentation of how the results of that interpretation was disseminated, and 4) evidence of changes made in the educational program as a result of the evaluative analysis. López states, "The quality of a general education program is, I believe, what a faculty values and is willing to be accountable for" (p. 43).

### 9. Combining Change Initiatives

Most campuses have become fertile grounds for rethinking the undergraduate curriculum and for experimenting with a variety of new approaches to general education. Too often, however, these efforts are isolated from one another. Campus visitors find, for example, that groups working on writing across the curriculum, moral and ethical educa-

tion, global studies, and problem-based approaches to calculus instruction have little or nothing to do with each other. However, the agendas of each of these initiatives can be furthered by connecting the pieces, combining forces, and working together.

Indeed, leaders of various curriculum change initiatives that may seem to be unrelated can derive a powerful synergy by sharing experiences and working together for organizational change. Writing about efforts to infuse cultural pluralism throughout the curriculum, Betty Schmitz (1992, p. 81) points to "the importance of capitalizing on the knowledge and experience of those in writing programs, faculty development programs, area studies, women's studies, and American ethnic studies."

In connecting the effort to improve general education with other change initiatives, it is especially helpful for faculty leaders to work closely with academic administrators, since they may have very different perspectives and understandings of institutional priorities and resources. In fact, this is one of the times when faculty members and administrators must put aside their customary suspicions of each other and work together to devise a process that is most likely to result in broad areas of agreement supporting a stronger curriculum.

### 10. Convergence of Two Movements for Change

While reformers have been working to improve general education, another set of proposed reforms—involving accountability, fiscal responsibility, and prudent management—has been traveling a separate but parallel track. These tracks often converge, however, and occasionally they collide. For example, when the Florida legislature discovered wide variations in the practices of institutions in the state system, it responded by mandating that general education include no more than thirty-six credit hours and that a baccalaureate degree include no more than 120 credit hours. The legislature reasoned that if one institution could provide an undergraduate education within these parameters, then every school ought to be able to do so. In practice, however, the legislative mandate posed a significant limitation for many curricular reformers who had designed general education programs requiring a larger number of credit hours. In this instance, one engine of reform crashed into the other. However, it may be possible to couple these two engines, in order to achieve higher quality education at a lower cost.

These two reform agendas have been driven by two different sets of leaders. On campuses, the *improvement* agenda has been led by academic administrators and faculty members, and off campus it has been aided by educational associations and foundations. The *accountability* agenda has been led by presidents, chief financial officers, planners,

and assessment experts on campus, supported off campus by groups such as state coordinating boards, governors' offices, legislative staffs, and corporate leaders. Experts in the improvement effort have little standing with leaders of the accountability effort, and vice versa.

To achieve their purposes, each group needs to enlist the leaders of the other. Their interdependence has to do with an accident of academic history. Authority over the instructional program was, for most of its history, held by church leaders, boards of trustees, presidents, and administrators. After decades of conflict, however, this authority was ceded to college faculty. Professional authority replaced bureaucratic authority in matters concerning the curriculum and in judging the qualifications of faculty. But the faculty was never charged with managing the instructional program efficiently. Now, the faculty *has authority but lacks accountability*. The administration, on the other hand, *has accountability but lacks authority over the curriculum*. Indeed, the faculty is jealous of its hard-won authority and has learned to keep administrators from "meddling" in the curriculum.

*General education in particular and the curriculum in general must be both effective and economical.*

In order to develop programs that are both effective and sustainable in a climate of scarce resources—and to avoid draconian measures sometimes imposed by external authorities to conserve resources—it will be necessary for leading actors from each of these separate movements to work together. General education in particular and the curriculum in general must be both effective and economical; changes must be supported both by the faculty and by those with control over resources. Reformers would do well to keep in mind three crucial goals:

- presidents and other key administrators must recognize the centrality of educational programs and once again become *educational leaders*, not just managers, fund raisers, or external spokespersons.
- faculty must develop an *institutional perspective*, acquire expertise in institutional functioning, make institutional service an honorable activity, and support administrators in making hard decisions about academic change.
- general education must be recognized as *the central and largest academic program*, worthy of the time and attention of senior and full-time faculty.

## Conclusion

As this essay has shown, ideas about general education that once were on the cutting edge have been replaced by newer ideas, and the passage of time has changed the dynamics of what had seemed relatively fixed. Academics, however sophisticated they may have been in the past about general and liberal education, must read, study, and together think through issues of general education on a continuous basis if they are to remain current and provide effective leadership for this central and largest academic program.

Today, we are still pursuing the charge given to the academy by the 1985 report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, issued by this Association, namely ". . . to revive the responsibility of the faculty as a whole for the curriculum as a whole" (p. 9). Some of the faculty do take responsibility for portions of the curriculum, primarily departmental faculty for their major programs of study. But departmental loyalties often interfere with the ability to provide policy and administrative oversight for the general education curriculum, and institutional incentives are too often insufficient to overcome the obstacles to change.

Although general education is no longer the "hot button" issue that it was during the late 1970s and 1980s, it remains a continuing concern. In the last few months alone, I have visited three campuses that have just begun to revise their general education programs (in each case, for the first time in about thirty years). And I visited a campus that has just graduated its first class under a distinctive new core curriculum. Meanwhile, two academic administrators, former colleagues of mine, sent copies of general education proposals just passed by the faculty at their institutions. Two others called to ask for advice: Their two-year schools had been given four-year status, and they were looking for names of consultants who could help them to devise new general education programs. Clearly, general education remains a priority for many academic leaders.

*Responsibility rests with the faculty to assure that the general education program is strong.*

In the final analysis, responsibility rests with the faculty to assure that the general education program is strong, that it reflects the best of contemporary thinking, and that it meets the particular educational goals of the institution. And it is incumbent on administrators to fashion incentives that encourage and support faculty in this effort. We know that when faculty members and administrators work together, they can conduct a meaningful review of the undergraduate program and, where necessary, make the changes needed for a rigorous and engaging core curriculum.

## Works Cited


American Commitments. 1996. *American pluralism and the college curriculum*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Association of American Colleges. 1985. *Integrity in the college curriculum: A report to the academic community*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.

Astin, A.S. 1993. *What matters in college?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bennett, W.J. 1984. *To reclaim a legacy*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities.

Bloom, A. 1987. *The closing of the American mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Boyer, E.L. 1987. *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper Collins.

Boyer, E.L. and A. Levine. 1981. *A quest for common learning*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. 1977. *Missions of the college curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cheney, L.V. 1989. *Fifty hours*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities.

Chickering, A. and Z. Gamson. 1991. *Applying the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 47. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Farmer, J. 1997. Using technology. In J.G. Gaff, J.L. Ratcliff, and Associates. *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ferren, A.S. 1997. Achieving effectiveness and efficiency. In J.G. Gaff, J.L. Ratcliff, and Associates. *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fidler, P.P. and M.S. Hunter. 1989. How seminars enhance student success. In M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner, and Associates. *The freshman year experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Froh, R.C. and M. Hawkes. 1996. Assessing student involvement in learning. In R.J. Menges, M. Weimer, and Associates. *Teaching on solid ground*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gaff, J.G. 1991. *New life for the college curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gaff, J.G., J.L. Ratcliff, and Associates. 1997. *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hirsch, E.D. 1987. *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kanter, S., Z.F. Gamson, and H.B. London. 1997. *Revitalizing general education in a time of scarcity*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

López, C. 1998. How campuses are assessing general education. *Liberal Education* 84 (3), 36-43.

Matthews, R.S., B.L. Smith, J. MacGregor, and F. Gabelnick. 1997. Creating learning communities. In J.G. Gaff, J. L. Ratcliff, and Associates. *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

National Association of Scholars. 1996. *The dissolution of general education: 1914-1993*. Princeton, N.J.

National Association of Scholars.

Schmitz, B. 1992. *Core curriculum and cultural pluralism*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Smith, Daryl, et al. 1997. *Diversity works. The emerging picture of how students benefit*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

## Further Recommended Reading

Astin, Alexander W. 1985. Involvement: The cornerstone of excellence. *Change* 17 (4): 35-39.
Excellence often is defined in terms of resources (physical plant, library volumes, endowment) or reputation (faculty research, student test scores, graduates earning advanced degrees). Excellence in education, however, ought to mean developing the talent of students, indicated by the "value added" to the student by the college. Research shows that student involvement in the academic enterprise—in all of its forms—is the most powerful educational force.

Carnochan, W. B. 1993. *The battleground of the curriculum: Liberal education and American experience*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Carnochan maintains that contemporary debates over the role of higher education within the United States and the "curricular wars" being fought today are part of a controversy spanning the last two centuries. This book examines higher education practices in the context of Americans' particular history and culture, and points out the social and historical constructedness of our concept of "liberal education."

Gabelnick, Faith, Jean MacGregor, Roberta Matthews, and Barbara Leigh Smith. 1990. *Learning communities. Creating connections among students, faculty, and disciplines*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 41. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Learning is an individual but not solitary activity, the authors argue; at its best, it occurs in a community of learners. The authors describe various forms of learning communities, the advantages for faculty members and students, strategies for developing them, and some of their consequences.

Gaff, Jerry G. 1990. Avoiding the potholes: Strategies for reforming general education. *Educational Record* 60, 50-59.
This paper is a primer for faculty and administrative leaders of a curriculum reform process. It stresses the importance of following an effective process, identifies forty-three procedures used by curriculum committees that lead to potholes, and discusses alternative strategies that may be more successful.

Gardner, John N., Gretchen Van der Veer, and Associates. 1998. *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Sequel to the 1989 volume *The Freshman Year Experience*, this compilation of essays provides a blueprint of successful strategies and ideas to enrich students' final year of college. Viewing the senior year as one of student transition, the editors and contributors offer information on senior courses and programs as well as "practical strategies for improving the passage from senior year into the workforce or graduate school."

Johnston, Joseph S. Jr., et al. 1991. The demand side of general education: Attending to student attitudes and understandings. *Journal of General Education* 40, 180-200.
The purpose of this article "is to make a case for focusing on student attitudes and understandings in attempts to strengthen general education." Arguing that general education reforms are at an impasse, the authors recommend that campuses turn their attention from what the institution provides to what the students think and need. In addition to lack of leadership and organizational support for general education, inappropriately trained faculty, disincentives to faculty for general education teaching and advising, and higher education institutions' inertia in improving the process of general education, students' attitudes and understandings of general education prevent them from recognizing the value of general education. This essay recommends integrating student services such as orientation and career guidance into academic advising and calls for

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

greater assessment of students' general cognitive development, attitudes, and proclivity toward learning.

Newell, William H., ed. 1998. *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the literature.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board.
This anthology contains numerous essays discussing the potential of interdisciplinary study and suggesting solutions to many practical problems encountered by college and university interdisciplinary programs within institutions structured around academic disciplines. Growing out of the 1992 Institute in Integrative Studies, the book demonstrates how present conditions in higher education call for greater interdisciplinarity. The essays lay out the major issues and evaluate the current status of interdisciplinarity, while Newell provides a literature review and research agenda.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 1997. *Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
In a vigorous response to critics of the academy, Martha C. Nussbaum defends the college-level multicultural curriculum and argues that sustained reform in liberal education is the most vital and invigorating force in higher education today. Nussbaum asserts that contemporary higher education, through curricular reform that advocates diverse forms of cross-cultural studies, is producing "citizens of the world," creating a community of critical thinkers that transcends the boundaries of class, gender, and nation. She draws on Socrates and the Stoics to establish the core values of liberal education, and then shows these values at work in a variety of schools across the nation.

Pascarella, Ernest T., and Patrick T. Terenzini. 1991. *How college affects students.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
A comprehensive synthesis of more than 2,600 studies of the effects of college on a variety of college outcomes, ranging from cognitive, moral, and attitudinal development through socioeconomic attainment and the quality of life. The authors report that "evidence unequivocally indicates that greater content learning and cognitive development occur in classrooms where students are engaged in and by the instructional...process."

Rudolph, Frederick. 1977. *Curriculum: A history of the American undergraduate course of study since 1636.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Part of a Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education series, this book offers a comparative, historical perspective on the curriculum in American higher education. Placing the undergraduate curriculum in its shifting social context, Rudolph traces its historical developments and changes from 1636 to 1976.

Smith, Barbara Leigh, and Jean MacGregor. 1992. What is collaborative learning? In *Collaborative learning: A sourcebook for higher education,* edited by Anne Goodsell, et al. Syracuse, N.Y.: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.
A comprehensive overview of the characteristics, assumptions, goals, and approaches of collaborative learning by two well-known pioneers in the field. This booklet makes distinctions among terms often confused with one another (cooperative learning, learning communities, learner-centered instruction, group work, and so forth) and provides definitions. Descriptions of successful programs are included.

## AAC&U Publications on General Education

Association of American Colleges. 1985 (2nd ed. 1990). *Integrity in the college curriculum: A report to the academic community.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.
This report critiques the supermarket approach found in undergraduate curricula, calls on "the faculty as a whole to accept responsibility for the curriculum as a whole," and recommends a minimum required curriculum for all students.

Association of American Colleges and Universities. 1995. *Liberal learning and the arts of connection for the new academy.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The second in a series of reports written by a National Panel of scholars convened through AAC&U's American Commitments initiative, this report explores goals for liberal learning in a diverse democracy and argues that the liberal arts of the future will include ways of relating and learning across difference. Written for faculty members and curriculum committees, this report should be used in connection with American pluralism and the college curriculum.

———. 1995. *American pluralism and the college curriculum: Higher education in a diverse democracy*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
The third report in AAC&U's American Commitments initiative explores curricular practices that help prepare all students for a diverse society. It makes specific recommendations for teaching diversity across the curriculum, in both general education and major programs, and it describes effective diversity courses and requirements in a broad range of institutions—large and small, public and private, two- and four-year.

———. 1994. *Talking points on general education. Institutional package*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
The Institutional Package includes a workbook with a series of structured exercises on general education called "conversation starters," a case study of a revamped general education curriculum, and institutional policies promoting general education, all of which are included in the Individual Package, as well. In addition, the Institutional Package contains a 64-minute videotape from the 1991 AAC&U Asheville Institute on General Education and Proceedings of the 1991 Asheville Institute.

Humphreys, Debra. 1997. *General education and American commitments: A national report on diversity courses and requirements*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
One of a series of publications emerging from AAC&U's multi-project initiative, American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning, this report examines national trends in curricular transformation and traces the development of new intellectual and institutional frameworks for diversity in general education programs, courses, and requirements. It analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of various curricular models and provides exemplary syllabi and diversity curricula.

Jeavons, Thomas. 1991. *Learning for the common good: Liberal education, civic education, and teaching about philanthropy*. Foreword by Robert L. Payton. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.
A classic analysis of the centrality of service learning in liberal education, accompanied by a study of student experiences in service-linked courses and numerous examples from every kind of campus. The author argues that liberal arts courses about philanthropy and volunteerism can improve the quality of undergraduate education in general.

Johnston, Joseph S. Jr., and Richard J. Edelstein. 1993. *Beyond borders: Profiles in international education*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business.
Johnston and Edelstein recommend that international studies be integrated into the college curriculum as part of liberal education. Beginning with a comprehensive review of current literature in international studies, this monograph provides guidelines for the successful internationalization of higher education, as well as profiles of promising educational models and international studies initiatives undertaken by various colleges and universities.

Meacham, Jack. 1996. *Assessing general education: A questionnaire to initiate campus conversations*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
Conceived as a way "to help college and university faculty and academic administrators initiate a conversation about general education," this questionnaire identifies 28 categories in which to think about and assess general education curricula. Educational practitioners can use this document to analyze their own curriculum and compare their own and others' perspectives on the core curriculum.

Project on Strong Foundations for General Education. 1994. *Strong foundations: Twelve principles for effective general education programs*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This monograph recommends strategies and procedures for sustaining vitality and strength in general education. Twelve principles are drawn from practices at colleges and universities that have made a variety of improvements in general education curricula. Included are examples from all types of colleges and universities.

Schmitz, Betty. 1992. *Core curriculum and cultural pluralism: A guide for campus planners*. Washington, DC: Association for American Colleges.
This study reports on emerging models for multiculturalism in core curricula and provides a practical roadmap for academic leaders working to design new general education programs. It includes sample syllabi, core proposals, curriculum profiles, and a step-by-step guide through the potholes of curriculum change and faculty development.

Schneider, Carol G. 1991. Engaging cultural legacies: A multidimensional endeavor. *Liberal Education* 77 (May/June), 2-7.
This introduction to a special issue of AAC&U's journal on the Association's project on Cultural Legacies describes efforts to engage cultural diversity in core programs. This issue also contains brief reports on the core programs at seventeen of the sixty-three institutions participating in the Cultural Legacies project.

Schneider, Carol G., and Robert Shoenberg. 1998. *Contemporary understandings of liberal education*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
This discussion paper examines the emergence of broad agreement on what students ought to learn from their baccalaureate studies and finds a strong trend toward collaborative, experiential, service, and integrative modes of learning. But the authors also contend that outdated structures, practices, and reward systems frustrate higher education's ability to reap the full benefits of new directions in general education reform.

Task Group on General Education. 1988. *A new vitality in general education: Planning, teaching, and supporting effective liberal learning*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.
General education is defined as "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all of us use and live by during most of our lives—whether as parents, citizens, lovers, travelers, participants in the arts, leaders, volunteers, or good Samaritans." This monograph provides many examples of curricular alternatives, approaches to teaching and learning, and administrative support necessary for effective general education.

Zemsky, Robert. 1989. *Structure and coherence: Measuring the undergraduate curriculum*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.
After studying more than twenty-five thousand student transcripts, Zemsky concludes that, "there is a notable absence of structure and coherence in college and university curricula." This monograph discusses breadth and depth in college students' learning in light of the results.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## AAC&U Statement on Liberal Learning

A truly liberal education is one that prepares us to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. It is an education that fosters a well grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions. Liberal education requires that we understand the foundations of knowledge and inquiry about nature, culture and society; that we master core skills of perception, analysis, and expression; that we cultivate a respect for truth; that we recognize the importance of historical and cultural context; and that we explore connections among formal learning, citizenship, and service to our communities.

We experience the benefits of liberal learning by pursuing intellectual work that is honest, challenging, and significant, and by preparing ourselves to use knowledge and power in responsible ways. Liberal learning is not confined to particular fields of study. What matters in liberal education is substantial content, rigorous methodology and an active engagement with the societal, ethical, and practical implications of our learning. The spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students.

Because liberal learning aims to free us from the constraints of ignorance, sectarianism, and short sightedness, it prizes curiosity and seeks to expand the boundaries of human knowledge. By its nature, therefore, liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.

The ability to think, to learn, and to express oneself both rigorously and creatively, the capacity to understand ideas and issues in context, the commitment to live in society, and the yearning for truth are fundamental features of our humanity. In centering education upon these qualities, liberal learning is society's best investment in our shared future.

## About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association devoted to providing contemporary liberal education for all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Since its founding in 1915, AAC&U's membership has grown to nearly 700 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local level and to help individual institutions keep student learning at the core of their educational programs as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

AAC&U's current priorities are:

Mobilizing collaborative leadership--
for educational and institutional effectiveness

Building faculty capacity--
in the context of institutional renewal

Strengthening curricula--
to serve student and societal needs

Establishing diversity--
as an educational and civic priority

Fostering global engagement--
in a diverse but connected world

Association
of American
Colleges and
Universities

AAC&U

Advancing
Liberal
Learning

BEST COPY AVAILABLE